

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

*****news release

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DUCK PRODUCTION STILL AFFECTED BY DROUTH, INTERIOR DEPARTMENT SAYS

Reports from major duck nesting areas across the North American Continent indicate that drouth is still affecting the production of ducks, the Department of the Interior announced today.

Weather and water conditions in Alaska, southern Alberta, Ontario, the Dakotas, western Minnesota, Nebraska, and the western part of southern Saskatchewan were poor this year. Compared with last year, decreased fall flights from all these areas, except southern Saskatchewan, are expected, the Department said.

Considerable increases in the fall flight are expected over last year from northern Saskatchewan and from Manitoba. Despite adverse weather in northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories, a somewhat larger fall flight is also indicated from these areas. Some increase is anticipated from Oregon, Montana, and Maine. Flights from Quebec, Labrador, southern Saskatchewan, California, Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, eastern Minnesota, and Ohio are expected to about equal those of last year.

Breeding conditions in Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Missouri were also below average, but the number of birds produced in these States is comparatively small.

Most of the ducks harvested by hunters each year are raised in the prairie pothole breeding range in the southern portions of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, and in North Dakota, South Dakota, and western Minnesota. Drouth in this area first reached serious proportions in the summer of 1959.

There was gradual improvement in 1962 and 1963, but from an estimated 2,320,000 ponds in July 1963 there was a reduction to 1,570,000 during July this year, according to aerial surveys just completed.

Within the pothole breeding range, the eastern portion was generally in as good or better condition than a year ago, while the western part was poorer.

Conditions also were adverse in some portions of the far north. Alaska experienced the latest spring break-up on record. Rapid snow melt and heavy runoff flooded low-lying river flats and deltas where many birds ordinarily nest. Essentially the same weather pattern occurred in the western portion of the Northwest Territories, another important nesting area.

Weather conditions were good to excellent in the northern portions of Saskatchewan and Manitoba. In the Northwestern States, breeding habitat conditions were generally good.

Portions of breeding areas supply each of the four flyways and the Department expects there will be a small decrease in the fall flight of ducks to the Pacific and Central Flyways compared with last year and that in the Mississippi and Atlantic Flyways flights will be about the same as last year.

By flyway, the flight forecasts are as follows:

Pacific Flyway

Ducks - breeding areas with increased production will not equal areas with decreases; a small decrease in the fall flight is indicated.

Geese and brant - it is expected that the fall flight will be the same as last year for all species except the Great Basin Canada goose and brant, which will decrease a small amount.

Coots - no change from last year.

Central Flyway

Ducks - increases in some production areas will not equal decreased production in other areas; a small decrease in the fall flight is forecast.

Geese - the fall flight of all species of geese is expected to be the same as in 1963.

Coots - small increase over last year.

Mississippi Flyway

Ducks - breeding conditions are better than those in production areas supplying the Pacific and Central Flyways and are about equal to last year; no change in the flight is forecast.

Geese - the fall flight of all species of geese will be the same as in 1963.

Coots - small increase over last year.

Atlantic Flyway

Ducks - no change in breeding conditions from last year; no change expected in the fall flight.

Geese and brant - it is anticipated that the fall flight of Canadas and brant will be about the same as in 1963.

Coots - small increase over last year.

The annual surveys to measure waterfowl breeding population and production success sample approximately 2,375,000 square miles of habitat in the Northern United States and Canada. Airplanes are used to cover most of this vast area, but intensive ground surveys are used in some areas.

According to these surveys, the total number of ducks returning to the breeding grounds, except for pintails, increased as compared to a year ago, but bad weather and drouth has curtailed their production.

These reports are based on waterfowl production surveys just completed by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife of the Fish and Wildlife Service and upon data collected by its personnel and by State and private cooperators in the duck nesting areas. A consolidated Bureau report will be presented to the four flyway councils August 6 and 7 and to the Waterfowl Advisory Committee of the Director of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife on August 11.

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